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**Governance, participation and hegemony: governing Cananea and the Río Sonora Region**

**By Valeria Guarneros-Meza**

**Abstract**

By building upon critical debates on ‘network governance’ in policy-making, while finding complementarities with debates on corporate social responsibility in Mexican mining, the paper argues that in the (mis)management of information and implementation of participatory mechanisms, ‘administrative domination’ is found through the relationships held between government authorities and the mining corporation. Based on Cananea and the Sonora River Region, Gramscian understandings of hegemony are discussed. However, this approach faces limitations when encountering decentered relations that go beyond state actors. Therefore, Foucauldian debates on governmentality are useful to complement understandings on the nature of power relations in existing governance arrangements.

For centuries, Mexico has been known for its mining industry. However, since the new millennium, mining production and its accompanying technologies has achieved unprecedented records. Sariago (2016:27) argues that between 2000 and 2016 the amount of gold extracted doubled that extracted between 1521 and 1830, while silver extraction was 60% higher in the same period. In 2013 a series of reforms intensified natural resource extraction in Mexico. Although these reforms pertain mostly to the energy sector, such as oil, hydrocarbons and renewable energies, during this same period, minor reforms to mining regulation were carried out to streamline the issuing of concessions and to prolong contracts with corporations for up to 50 years. These new changes are commonly known as the expansion of the mining frontier.

Extraction of resources has undoubtedly been accompanied by conflict. Many debates in the Latin American context (Bebbington et al., 2008; Svampa, 2018; Vetlmeyer and Petras, 2014) have centered on the political economy of resources and communities' struggle to defend life-styles threatened by the expansion of the industry. Fewer cases, however, have focused on policy-making and on the role of government actors in forging spaces of participation to reduce levels of conflict when problems of institutional capacity and limited landscapes of regulations exist (Bebbington et al., 2019; Coelho and Favareto, 2008; Zaremberg and Torres Wong, 2018). The focus on participatory mechanisms is relevant as a generation ago it was considered key for democratizing Mexico. In particular, local governance arrangements, alongside decentralization, were considered potential ways to consolidate democracy (Grindle, 2007; Meza, 2018).

By building upon critical approaches to 'network governance' in policy-making, while finding complementarities with debates on corporate social responsibility in Mexican mining, the paper argues that in the (mis)management of information and implementation of participatory mechanisms, 'administrative domination' is found through the relationships held between government authorities and the mining corporation. This domination is achieved by a threefold strategy: (i) the corporation's distancing from policy responsibility, (ii) legitimacy through control and (iii) the concealment of coercive tactics. The argument is based on a Gramscian understanding of hegemony in the governance of place. However, this approach faces limitations when encountering decentered relations that go beyond the state; therefore, Foucauldian debates on governmentality are useful to complement understandings on the nature and exercise of power relations in existing governing arrangements. In using Gramsci's hegemony and Foucault's governmentality it is possible to unravel everyday practices carried out by state and non-state actors, while also reframing my analysis into the importance of historicity and scale.

The argument focuses on data collected from Cananea Municipality and the Sonora River region.[1] These areas have been impacted by a well-established mining industry, responding to global market forces such as commodity exports and their financialization as well as to transnational discourses of sustainable mining. Both represent a conjunctural space in which labor, environmental and cultural-identity conflicts converge. According to Tetreault (2019), the confluence of these types of conflicts are the archetype for understanding resistance against mining in Mexico and Latin America, and I will also add, for understanding local governance given the myriad relationships existing between multi-faceted actors in state, business and civil

society spheres. Fieldwork was carried out between August and November 2018; data collection included observations of everyday living over a three-week period and 39 in-depth interviews.[2] These were complemented by a documentary review which included policy reports, mining union bulletins, local newspaper articles, and human rights NGO reports. Thematic analysis was followed in the coding of the interview transcripts, fieldwork diaries and documents. Coding focused on repetitive practices and links to concepts related to governance, participation and corporate social responsibility (CSR), all of which fed into broader analysis of the coercion-consensus dialectics under Gramscian hegemony.

First, the paper describes a series of recent historical events that help to contextualize local governance in Cananea and the Sonora River Region. The second section discusses the significance of a Gramscian approach in analyzing mining in these regions and the complementarities with Foucault's governmentality. The next section explains how debates on network governance are articulated with CSR as a way of introducing administrative domination in mining towns; with empirical data the fourth and fifth sections unpack practices of administrative domination, which culminate in the threefold strategy. Finally, conclusions are presented, underlining the policy relevance of the framework developed.

## **Framing Cananea and the Sonora River Region**

Cananea is a north-western town located in Sonora State, 60 km from Arizona, in the United States. In 2015, it had a population of 35,892 inhabitants (INEGI, 2015). Cananea has been a mining copper town par excellence since colonial times. It is seat of Buenavista del Cobre (BdC) Mine owned by Grupo Mexico Corporation (GpMx); it is the biggest mine in the country, the fourth largest copper mine in the world and unsurprisingly, the corporation is owned by one of the four richest men in Mexico. Cananea is also renowned for its labor struggles, the most relevant strikes being the 1906 insurrection of mining workers against precarious wages and long working hours and the 2007 strike led by Branch 65 of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos, Siderúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana* (National Union of Mining, Metallurgic, Steel and Similar Workers of the Mexican Republic, SNTMMSSRM). The latter strike resulted from neoliberal economic policies that promoted the privatization of state-owned enterprises, alongside changes in labor contracts and working conditions that undermined many of the benefits that the SNTMMSSRM enjoyed during the nationalization period. The fatal accident in 2006, where 65 workers died in the Pasta de Conchos Mine in Coahuila State, also owned by GpMx, prompted Branch 65 to strike as workers in BdC experienced similar precarious working conditions.

The 2007 strike is significant as it has contributed to shaping both the power relationships in Cananea and contemporary national labor and development policies (for a preamble see Sariego, 2013). Nearly 650 workers (Soy Cobre, 2018) and their families are still affected by the strike as they cannot be redeployed in the regional mining sector. The lack of formal and well-paid jobs has jeopardized these families'

access to home ownership, which was a condition that was comfortably afforded in the early-1980s. Decreased quality of public health provision, access to potable water and household waste collection are residents' everyday concerns. These services have gradually been neglected by local government authorities as they struggle to build capacity to absorb responsibilities that were once those of the mine when it was a state-owned enterprise (Sariego, 2013).

The 2007 strike was an event that has permeated people's memories regardless of their background and social class. However, for the workers still affiliated to Branch 65, the strike has been a 12-year process of endurance and solidarity; whereas for other residents the strike finished in 2010, when the mine reopened its operations after a three-year closure and subcontracted labor through its network of suppliers. The effects of the strike are surprisingly present in the town's urban space and street layout. The strike started with violent protests along the main street, Benito Juárez, which in its heyday was remembered as a street full of life with pedestrians, local shops, the town's hospital and a local school, and most importantly the activity of mining lorries going in and out the mine's main entrance, known as 'Gate 1'. Nowadays, this part of town, known as *Cananea Vieja*, feels like a ghost town, with empty streets and derelict buildings. Efforts to gentrify the historic area have been limited despite many buildings from the early-1900s preserving Cananea's architectural style. The premises owned by Branch 65 (funerary premises, auditorium, among others), also located in this quarter, are also run down. Over the last decade, local shops have moved northwards around the main plaza and further along the highway heading towards the US-Mexican border.

The long labor struggle overlapped with the 2014 mining spill that originated from the negligent maintenance of the BdC tailings dam. Although the spill did not impact Cananea physically, it impacted its local as well as the regional governance of the Sonora River. The accident leaked 40 million liters of acidulant copper into the 400 km-long Sonora River, which travels from the mountainous region of Sonora down to the valley of Hermosillo City, the state's capital city. The volume and toxicity of the spill was categorized by the then Minister of Environment as 'the worst mining accident in Mexican history'. Authority reports [3] indicate that in the first few months, the environmental damage impacted the water quality of the river, which provides water to a population of approximately 22,000 inhabitants dispersed throughout the seven municipalities along the river, and one of the two dams providing water to Hermosillo. Acidulant copper and other heavy metals affected the crops and livestock of peasants and ranchers farming near the river. The accident was followed by an economic recession in the region. Although the Federal Attorney for Environment Protection (Environmental Auditing officer\_035, Mexico City) and the state-level government Ministry of Economy (Direction of Mining officer\_034, Hermosillo) confirmed that water levels are not contaminated, four years later, health problems continue to be reported by academic investigations and human rights NGOs (PODER, 2018). These reports unveil the levels of anxiety, uncertainty and fear of the environment in which people live.

Unsurprisingly, the disaster was identified as an opportunity for Branch 65 to seek allies from the communities affected. A short-lived alliance was made with environmental mobilizations existing in Hermosillo, who after the disaster formed the Frente de Defensa Río Sonora (Defense Front Rio Sonora, FDRS). The Branch 65-

FDRS alliance was seen in street protests and sit-ins that took place in Cananea immediately after the spill, particularly outside *Los Patos*, the main water-well that pumps water to BdC (SNTMMSSRM, 2015). The nascency of a 'movement against Grupo Mexico' was mentioned in public speeches aiming to tackle environmental, labor and human rights abuses. Sit-ins outside *Los Patos* lasted three months, until federal police arrived to remove protestors. State repression was not reported in the news, but in fieldwork conversations, we were told that Branch 65 members were armed with sticks and knives in case confrontation with authorities turned violent, while committing acts of vandalism against GpMx's property. This type of disobedience discouraged some residents from the lowlands who were not used to confronting state authorities through (armed) struggle and party politics.

The appetite to mobilize by those residents who did not want to join Branch 65 began with the building of relationships with Project on Organizing, Development, Education and Research (PODER), an international NGO aiming to improve corporate transparency and responsibility through a human rights perspective. PODER has offered an alternative that materialized in a long-term socio-legal strategy against GpMx and government authorities who turned a blind eye to the negligence and irregularities followed by BdC. Since 2014, PODER has worked closely with the affected communities to raise 15 constitutional injunctions (*amparos*); some have reached the National Supreme Court of Justice against a wide range of government authorities (from environmental, health, agrarian ministries and respective regulators to municipal councils) and GpMx. In two of these claims the court ruling has favored the communities; the first in 2015 which recognized that water wells were contaminated and GpMx had to provide water-plant



treatments as part of its remedial plan, and the second published in 2018, establishing that all business corporations which have a direct impact on the environment have to consult local communities, indigenous or not, in their infrastructure plans.[4] In informing, training and mentoring communities on how to prepare and submit legal claims, PODER encouraged residents to organize in citizen committees, named *Comités de Cuenca Río Sonora* (Sonora River Basin Committees, CCRS). CCRS have been creating a sub-regional front that has gradually excluded Cananea and its historical labor movement (PODER officers\_009 and 038; Hermosillo and Mexico City).

Cananea residents, especially former mining workers, are aware of small environmental accidents BdC has had in the past, but their small scale and the capacity of the mine to neutralize their effects had not reached national news. Madrigal's (2019) historical ethnography underlines that the residents of Cananea have become habituated to the negative externalities of mining that are experienced daily, to the extent that they begin to normalize pollution as part of their lives and gradually begin to render these experiences positive. During fieldwork, informal chats with residents revealed that they considered the yellow-blueish coloring of the local stream pretty and that increasingly it was becoming something to highlight to visitors. Residents do not deny the contamination generated by mining, but instead show resignation combined with self-deprecating humor.

## **Hegemony and its limitations for studying mining governance**

The introductory description in the previous section is relevant to flesh out the contribution of Gramscian hegemony in understanding local governance. I argue that the concept of hegemony is important in understanding power relations and their practices in Cananea and the Sonora River region. However, this approach faces limitations when encountering decentered relations that go beyond the state.

In studying Mexican political economy, Gramscian hegemony has been applied to unpack the country's capitalist power relations on different and across scales of action: international, national and regional (Hesketh, 2017; Morton, 2007; Rubin, 1997). Hegemony is a dialectic concept built upon both coercion and consensus and the multiple forms that both mechanisms simultaneously entail to maintain dominant groups' interests. Because capitalism is prone to crisis and contradictions, dominant groups cannot deliver consistently the promises announced in their consensual approach, generally observed through negotiations held to incorporate partially subaltern groups' interests or demands. Therefore, hegemony is continuously resisted or challenged by subaltern groups. Negotiation tactics are materialized in policies and programs which require state and civil society institutions to be rolled out and adopted by the popular sectors. The compound state-civil society is what Gramsci called the 'integral state'. However, when negotiation fails, force tends to be used as the alternative to endure the dominant classes' struggle for hegemony (Davies, 2012).

Power relations in Cananea have been studied through a Gramscian approach (Herner, 2001), because it has been a cradle of labor-rights struggles incorporated in the 1917 Mexican Constitution and because it represents the blurring of economic and political interests materialized through mining, which has helped nurture the country's 21<sup>st</sup> century commodities boom and its association to the modernization discourse (Sariego, 2016). As discussed below, through consensual strategies, attempts to acculture the population of Cananea to accepting mining as the only alternative for development have been present. By focusing on Cananea and the Sonora River Region, this paper contributes to Morton's (2013) call for a focus on space and multi-scalar relationships in order to understand and tackle the uneven geographical development of state power and its operation.

However, a Gramscian approach is not enough to understand Cananea's governance. The centrality of BdC specifically, and GpMx more generally, has revealed that the decentered nature of power from the state to other non-state actors, and in particular, to mining companies in modern enclave towns are important to consider (Smart, 2020). I argue that this decentered nature has been increasingly captured in the policies of CSR. As discussed below, the debates around the aspirations and limitations of CSR have been useful in identifying business's contributions and operations of power, alongside the state (Hilson, 2012).

Ekers and Loftus (2013: 18) are among several scholars who argue that a Gramscian method demands we define concepts in relation to historically and geographically situated practices, which may require the use of other intellectual traditions. These authors' (2008) argument on the complementarity between

Gramsci's hegemony and ideology and Foucault's governmentality and power is useful to understand the decentered nature of power in governing arrangements. Based on Gramsci's work, I am interested in the consensual arm of hegemony which focuses not on sanctions but on tactics to create deeper attachments to a way of thinking and acting, especially through policies and programs. Based on Foucault's work, the diffusion of power through a social body of relations is relevant; in particular, relations between GpMx and the communities its mining activities impact, which materialize in administrative 'practices that aim to control everyday life' (Ekers and Loftus, 2008: 706).

For Foucault (in Ekers and Loftus, 2008), daily discipline is not only centered on the state, but is also dispersed in practices and knowledge promoted and embodied by non-state actors, such as schools, prisons or hospitals. Hence, state and non-state actors constitute a network of relations that contribute to the basis of modern forms of rule; for these authors Foucault's interpretation 'might be seen to have antecedents in Gramsci's work on the integral state' (2008:704).

The dispersion of governmental relations is key in understanding debates on network governance. These debates underline the blurred distinction between state, civil society and the business sector in the policy-making process. The state has become an interorganizational network made up of governmental and societal actors with no sovereign actor being able to steer or regulate them (Rhodes, 1997; Kooiman, 2003). The elements of citizen and community participation in CSR debates are central to my argument, which in this decentered context, alludes to debates on policy-making encapsulated by network governance. Davies (2012:2688) argues that

network governance is a broad church term with 'common reference points across social sciences', but of importance in these debates is the 'cultivation of networks between public authorities and other actors' in order to reduce governing transactions costs between state, markets and societies through, albeit highly questionable relations of trust and collaboration that at times require hidden coercive tactics.

These networks require management and coordination, which aim to be flexible and information rich (2012:2689). Davies argues that network governance can be understood as a form of Gramsci's 'integral state' pursuing hegemony. With Foucault to help him, he also delves to bring Gramscian abstract theorizations down onto the local scale (Davies, 2014). In doing so, he recognizes that a Foucauldian approach has limitations on two important fronts, both of which are relevant to my argument: the inadequate theorization of the relationship between the coercive and non-coercive execution of power and the inattention to scale, in particular, how power is configured in cities or municipalities (2014:3219) and in relation to national and international scales. In bringing together all these debates, this paper aims to underline the importance of Foucault's governmentality without forgetting Gramsci's insights, when studying local hegemony and its relationship with other spatial scales.

## **Corporate social responsibility as a vehicle for unpacking mining governance**

In mining, CSR policies have increasingly incorporated the term 'sustainable mining', which works as a vehicle of change that challenges the mining sector to rethink what regional and local development are (Antonelli, 2009). At its best, the interpretation of the term provides a more integrative approach, coupling the extraction of resources with human rights and community or citizen participation (vis-a-vis corruption and lack of transparency). Environmental sustainability is also pursued through management practices that allow the use of renewable natural resources to produce 'indispensable' goods for human subsistence, while including long-term mitigation and compensation schemes for communities impacted negatively by extraction (Antonelli, 2009; Smart 2020).

At its worst, sustainable mining can become a greenwashing tactic that accompanies other means for deflecting government regulation, while showcasing businesses' moral commitments to wellbeing (Shamir, 2010; Vogel, 2010). The latter enables a common language for state, enterprises and communities to co-govern in the local policy-making of sustainable development, but rather more often subjecting social considerations to commercial ones. Shamir (2005) argues that CSR models commonly consist of community and educational training programs that swap 'a rhetoric of political empowerment for a rhetoric of socioeconomic empowerment by educating and equipping people with skills and organizational tools' for coping with unemployment, displacement and self-provision (Taylor in Shamir, 2005: 107). Although sustainable mining commitments are voluntary commitments, rewards for attaining them have become important. Good CSR policies do not guarantee more

valuable stock shares for shareholders and investors, but provide instead risk management tools that enhance marketing, public, employee, and investor relations (Vogel, 2010: 77), especially as these shareholders are increasingly sympathizing with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

In studying the local scale, Davies (2012) argues that network governance, instead of only relying on trust among public officials, business leaders and community activists, can also be characterized by distrust. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to the coercive side of consensus that network governance entails. To ensure political stability and to compensate for existing levels of distrust, he argues that consensual administrative domination and the replication of coercive and exclusionary practices require careful unpicking.

The coercion-consensus dialectics is commonly found in processes of administrative domination, which are usually enacted by the state bureaucracy such as the magistracy, police, managers of urban space and housing, and regulatory functions of local authorities (2012: 2693), and I will argue also through the bureaucracy of the corporation through CSR policies. Davies contends that the perpetrators of administrative domination obscure injustices by promoting participation and collaboration among state, businesses and communities, which in turn conceal the coercive domination of political-economic elites. Administrative domination is relevant for studying sustainable mining within local governance arrangements, especially when the mining corporations have had a strong influence in the

management of local space and citizen participation in periods of labor, environmental and identity conflicts.

Garibay's (2019) analysis on 'negative reciprocity' is helpful to apply Davies' consensual coercion into mining governance. Garibay defines negative reciprocity as the intention of mining corporations to take everything while giving little or nothing in return. Corporations simulate a positive transaction, but under a model of domination, extraction of labor, goods and territory are obtained at a very low cost. Garibay argues that the main strategy of the Mexican business sector in implementing sustainable mining is the deployment of community development programs, encompassed by a CSR policy. Enterprises identify needs and aspirations of the community through participatory mechanisms to produce community development plans, which may include redress procedures and relocation of displaced groups as a result of mining expansion.

However, Garibay continues, while, on the one hand, the enterprise is following the discourse of participation, consultation and perhaps deliberation with community groups in achieving an agreement that 'favors' the community's wellbeing; on the other hand, through the networks built in the mining sector, the enterprise lobbies state actors across multi-level tiers of government to promote: favorable legal conditions; subsidies to facilitate investment and obtain incentives, licenses and permits; streamlining of administrative processes to appropriate land and resources (i.e. water); capture of state and community institutions through bribery and other



informal arrangements; or deactivation of any opposition to mining (i.e. aided by state policing and militarization) .

Within these activities that Garibay enlists, I argue that participation is used as an instrumental process to help implement objectives of territorial expansion and risk management to which contemporary mining activities are exposed; however, the (mis)management of information and of participatory mechanisms are simultaneously required to ensure an administrative and (limited) regulatory environment for businesses to thrive. It is in the mismanagement of information and implementation of participatory arrangements by state and business actors at the local level that administrative domination can be identified and where coercion concealed as consensus is enacted.

## **Administrative domination: a confluence of state and business practices**

The 2007 strike and 2014 spill undoubtedly prompted change in the policies and strategies carried out by GpMx, and at a micro-level, they are concessions that need to be made in striving for hegemony. Between 2009-2010, the Community Development Directorate (CDD) in the mining branch of GpMx was created. It has developed a humane approach in the building of relationships with communities directly impacted by mining, whilst also pursuing 'good neighborliness' through CSR. The CDD has invested in 'good corporate citizen' activities (Shamir, 2005) through community events, donations to local charities and community organizations and summer schools; but it was also found that the CDD has created ways of influencing local policy-making through participation embedded in the sustainable mining discourse.

The CDD is a decentralized directorate from the technical and productive side of the corporation; it has created its own brand coined Casa Grande. It is no coincidence that its foundation was a strategy to build harmony in the relationships between the enterprise and the community, which experienced state repression back in 2007. The economic recession that the town encountered as a result of the mine's closure over three years also added stress to the relationships between enterprise, community and local authorities. The program of activities lined up by Casa Grande over the subsequent years has played a vital role in regaining part of the trust lost by community members.

In 2009, on behalf of Casa Grande, a roadmap of economic, political, social and environmental assessments was carried out by a small team of sociologists/anthropologists to build a diagnostic study of Cananea. This roadmap worked as evidence to design a program of activities through which Casa Grande could contribute to the development of community activism and social cohesion across different age groups in Cananea. In the early stages of the program, infrastructure projects with regard to building improvements were also financed, but through the introduction of the mining tax in 2014, these activities have only focused on social development projects.

The program of activities stresses the importance of community skills, particularly leadership. Casa Grande considers itself a source of local leaders who have the vision to engage and promote ideas for Cananea's 'sustainable-mining' development. The leadership program interweaves with some principles of citizen participation, particularly with inclusion, transparency and accountability. The latter is observed through the Communitarian Committee (CC-CG) which promotes and sponsors community groups' social projects. The CC-CG is formed of between 8 and 10 citizens. Initially they were appointed by GpMx and subsequently by a smaller network of community members. Members have a professional background (school-teachers, doctors, etc.), they are well known residents and community activists. They also lack an immediate related past with mining workers in the low ranks. Casa Grande staff have designed processes where transparency and accountability are exercised by CC-CG through, for example, annual and regular meetings where CDD budget reports and business plans are presented, discussed and monitored. However, the extent to which these processes are transparent and accountable to

the rest of the public was a moot point during the interviews (CC-CG members\_020 and 023, Cananea).

After four years of restoring trust in the community, the spill disaster seriously questioned GpMx's sustainability agenda. There is an environment directorate in GpMx which deals directly with environmental management issues. However, if sustainable mining is supposed to build links between environmental and social and participatory matters, then these links were scarce. Apart from close communication between the general directors of both divisions and joint CRS annual reports, a more interwoven program of activities was lacking. Instead, it was found that during the immediacy of the spill, Casa Grande began to organize immediately, bringing over extra staff from other parts of the country and providing drinking water to the victims. Over a three-month period, it surveyed the impact that many localities down the river were experiencing, it provided initial compensations to households directly affected, and coordinated the collection of information with academics, voluntary groups and government authorities. This work provided a baseline on which federal authorities began implementing the remedial plan (GpMx officers\_005 and 010, Hermosillo).

By the end of 2014, federal government took over the management of the remedial plan. Led by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), a private trust was created, *Fideicomiso Río Sonora* (Sonora River Trust, FRS). The Trust held the funds offered by GpMx, who was sanctioned with a Mex\$2 million pesos remedial package. The implementation of the plan was led by state-government and municipal authorities (Lamberti, 2018). The mismanagement of the funds and ineffectiveness in distributing resources by government authorities at

individual and community levels has been published in NGO-investigative reports (Fundar, 2018; Lamberti, 2018). Among the administrative deficiencies underlined by these reports are problems with complete, timely and open information; corruption in the distribution of compensations; underspend of the MX\$2 million pesos; and lack of management capacity to operate water-purification plants and health services. GpMx had no direct responsibility in the management and operation of the remedial plan, but municipal authorities, who partnered with state and federal agencies, did. Surprisingly, no signs of Casa Grande influencing how participation could have made the FRS more transparent and accountable were identified in fieldwork, despite the fact that the lack of information, transparency and social accountability were the main problems addressed in the criticisms of the mismanagement handled by FRS. If Casa Grande was serious in tackling these democratic shortfalls, why did it not suggest participatory solutions to the criticisms raised?

Despite the partial delivery of the commitments agreed, the FRS closed in 2017. As a result, Casa Grande decided to invest resources in Cananea and the Sonora River region by funding the consultancy services of academics to help Rio Sonora municipalities develop comprehensive municipal development plans. This decision illustrates how Casa Grande's tentacles extend in policy-making and which are enhanced by the federal creation of a mining tax, colloquially known as *Fondo Minero* (Mining Fund, FM). Up until 2019, the FM aimed to reinvest the tax paid by mining companies into the states and municipalities where minerals were extracted, 80% of the collection was directed to earmarked social infrastructures which ranged from basic (urban) to more sophisticated infrastructures to improve water and air quality and build renewable energy sites.

Sonora State is the biggest beneficiary of this tax given its mining productivity, and Cananea was the municipality in all Sonora which obtained the largest amounts of the tax in 2017-18. [5]. The substantial revenue that Cananea received from the FM became an unprecedented opportunity for state-government and municipal authorities to begin strategizing tax distribution and implementation. The first municipal administration that benefited from this resource was the Herrera administration (2015-2018). In the first two years of this administration the FM was invested in road infrastructure. By 2017, 40% of Cananea's FM budget was allocated to participatory budgeting, entitled '*Cananea tu decides*' (Cananea you decide, CTD).

Participatory budgeting has become the World Bank's flagship of participation under a managerial rubric of transparency and accountability for local governments to reduce patronage and corruption, and from the early-2000s, it has fed 'good governance' understandings (Goldfrank, 2012). CTD was coupled with ideas of citizen inclusion and associated with the broader discourse on transparency pursued by both municipal and federal governments. The 13 projects voted for by citizens prioritized basic infrastructure, such as street tarmac, piped water and sewerage connections or street electrification. The number of infrastructure projects was notable; it more than doubled the investment that the previous two administrations together carried out. Interviews with residents (025 and 027, Cananea) and municipal authorities (senior politician\_011 and finance officer\_013, Cananea) underlined how this exercise created a space to begin trusting the municipal

administration after citizen consultations materialized in the construction of needed public works.

Although Casa Grande had no direct role in the design, management and allocation of resources that derived from participatory budgeting, during the first three years of the FM implementation, the head of CDD was the representative of the mining sector in the regional committee at state-level government. This committee ensured that the FM was spent according to municipal authority plans. The CDD's role in this regional committee can be interpreted as a tactical step by GpMx to understand how far its tax influenced not only the design and monitoring of fiscal monies, but also municipal governance decisions in infrastructure. In this sense, GpMx benefited from the infrastructural precarity that was present across different scales – neighborhood, municipality, region – and which complemented the broader national discourse on extractive industries as engines of modernization.

Mining town companies have had an incredible presence in the identity formation of place. This is a general characteristic that has been developed historically by all mine owners in Cananea (Harner, 2001), but it cannot be ignored that Casa Grande has added value in striving for a local hegemonic rule over the past decade as a response to the labor and environmental crises. Harner argues that Gramscian hegemony is present in Cananea through a continuous quest for an equilibrium, in which 'the meaning of place for the majority of residents matches the ideological beliefs of the class in power [GpMx and politicians]' (2001:676). In this sense, Casa Grande has contributed to hegemonic formation through the promotion of citizen

participation that expands across different dimensions: from its Communitarian Committee and sponsored projects, through its corporate citizen activities, to its support for participatory budgeting.

However, the participatory spaces Casa Grande creates lack the emancipatory values that democratic participation in principle entail, because the skills acquired in privately and publicly-led participations are subject to a market rationale. In fieldwork, observations of the summer activities offered to young people and in the criteria used to assess community projects receiving Casa Grande's financial and in-kind support, it was noticed that emancipatory training would have included awareness of human rights, exercises to build collective identity and social cohesion between rival groups as well as exercises to identify the community's limitations and fears with regard to quality of water. But instead, Casa Grande promoted individual leadership through exercises that nurtured aspirational and self-esteem activities and commitment towards others. The opportunity to develop this through CSR has been an attractive way to develop counter tactics to evade and co-opt, what Shamir (2005) calls, 'unwarranted political pressures' created by more combative groups such as SNTMMSSRM and PODER-CCRS, described in the introduction.



## Discussion

The following paragraphs analyze how administrative domination is embedded in a threefold strategy carried out jointly by GpMx and different state actors; it is composed of policy distancing, legitimacy control, and concealed coercion.

### Distancing from policy responsibility

In both NGO reports and during our interviews, questions arose about the fulfillment of the compensations carried out by GpMx with regard to FRS and the disaster victims and the limited encounters and negotiations held with the SNTMMSSRM in the aftermath of the strike through the Federal Council of Conciliation and Arbitration (015\_union member, Cananea). In analyzing the data, it was found that the common tactic that the corporation uses is that of stepping back and leaving responsibility to state actors to negotiate the terms and delivery of the compensations agreed. In order to carry out the latter, GpMx builds a series of relationships with all kinds of state authorities to negotiate terms that are convenient to the mining division of the corporation. At federal level our data underlined SEMARNAT and other ministries, including Work and Social Prevention (STPS), Agriculture and Rural Development (SAGARPA), Interior (SEGOB), Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development (SEDATU), and Federal Police; at state level with the governor and the Ministry of Economy, and at municipal level, the relationship was primarily built with mayors. The relationships with government agencies are used as a shield to cover GpMx from having direct contact with affected citizen groups. Ironically, this type of practice undermines the citizen participation element included in the sustainable-mining discourse.

The stepping-back tactic creates a distant and 'closed' image of GpMx. This image has helped to find ways for buying time to prolong judicial procedures that detach the corporation from its social responsibility. For example, in the *amparo* (ref. 144/2015) originally submitted by PODER, GpMx was considered the responsible authority for violating human rights as a result of the damage caused by the spill. However, state-level judicial authorities declined such claim. PODER considered this resolution biased as judicial authorities favored decisions that gave more time to GpMx to ponder a counter action to undermine the lawsuit (PODER, 2018). In this sense, it can be argued that GpMx treats government authorities as the janitor charged with doing the 'undesirable' work of dealing with organized citizens. It is government authorities who liaise, albeit in many cases ineffectively, with citizens' demands and it is they who are directly accused by the general public as being corrupt. Meanwhile, GpMx is exonerated of any wrongdoing, expressing contempt for government agencies' incapacity to 'put its house in order' to resolve citizen needs effectively. This contempt is reflected, for example, in GpMx's withdrawal of financial support to the FRS, especially when the latter could not solve problems effectively due to its administrative negligence in constructing and operating the epidemiological clinic to treat victims affected by the spill (UN, 2017:10).

Interestingly, the creation of the CDD-Casa Grande alongside the CSR policy has helped to overcome some of the faults that the distant and closed position of GpMx has created. Casa Grande aims to bring the corporation closer to the community through a program of activities that can be interpreted as opportunities for the

community to learn to self-develop and self-manage in contexts of public service withdrawal and closure of social services. As structural reforms have consolidated in the country, Casa Grande has plugged the void. These self-management and participative community activities can be read as GpMx's strategy to train Cananea's inhabitants to manage their own needs, while ensuring that in the long-term they do not demand from the corporation free basic services, as they once did when the mine was state-owned. But equally these practices may help the community to cope with government agencies' negligence regarding service provision. Locally, these agencies have been perceived as corrupt and, until participatory budgeting was implemented, unaccountable to citizens. In this sense, GpMx helps to create a participatory culture in the governance of Cananea, and this extends the managerial rubric of participation whilst ensuring that no direct responsibility for the decisions taken during implementation is charged to the corporation.

#### Legitimacy through urban-space and service-provision control

On the one hand, alongside the municipal government, Casa Grande has helped to prepare Cananea's application as *Pueblo Mágico* (Magic Town - a national recognition for towns that stand out for their beauty and customs) and to diversify Cananea's economy beyond mining through the support of wine production initiatives. Environmental projects have also been used to build a positive image. For example, the leisure park and shopping center *Plaza Tamosura* and the co-maintenance of the reserve federal park, known as the UMA. These quasi-private spaces are thought to compensate for the closure of public spaces such as the *Ojo de Agua*, a natural reserve bought by BdC to supply water to its mining activities.

Another example is the CDD's project to promote trade of the regional farming produce of the Sonora River, whose lowlands were affected by the spill (CDD officer\_036, Mexico City). These activities are complemented by other isolated projects in which GpMx's logo is seen in billboards and street furniture, showing that the corporation is involved in the construction of roads and highways and street maintenance of those municipalities along the river, which do not benefit from the FM. Through these types of activities, the CDD wants to show residents that the corporation generates a positive impact and that it cares.

On the other hand, Casa Grande has not shown interest in tackling issues that are relevant for a significant part of the population. It has not invested in reviving spaces in *Cananea Vieja*, which several residents claim built their identity. Nor has it found ways to help arrange independent, rigorous and open surveys about residents' preoccupations and perceptions regarding water scarcity and its quality and health services, which could influence local policies to address the management of natural resources in a transparent way. Anyone who visits Cananea and the river municipalities for a few weeks will realize that the architecture of the historic center and water scarcity are two of the population's main worries.

CDD staff (005 and 036, Hermosillo and Mexico City) claim that the program of activities they have been developing since 2009 in Cananea and since 2017 along the Sonora River responds to the socio-economic roadmap and diagnoses carried out by the corporation and which in theory include the populations' needs, worries and demands. Unfortunately, these reports are not publicly available as the

corporation's confidentiality must be respected. One inevitably questions why Casa Grande's program of activities has not addressed more openly these aspects that are relevant to the majority of the population. A possible answer may be that by addressing these issues, Casa Grande will contribute to reducing GpMx's legitimacy. In our sojourns of the city, one of the town's historians mentioned that GpMx is not 'really interested' in reviving the historic center. Doing so, would mean 'surrender to residents-workers who associate their identity with living and feeling' the city (fieldwork notes).

### Concealed coercion

The CDD has helped to conceal, but only to a limited extent, the corporation's coercive arm, as experienced in the 2007 strike. The latter left a precedent in the community as union workers and families confronted militarized police protecting the mine's premises. Repression (beating and tear gas) was used to control and disrupt street protests. After the violent conflict, BdC decided to build barricades and iron gates at all the entrances to the site. These entrances are closely guarded by private security and at different times by militarized police. The water wells found in the rural districts are all fenced, but *Los Patos* is the most secure and surveilled. One of the roads connecting Cananea to southern municipalities has armed guards and all car drivers must give their names while their license plates are checked. These guards, gates and fences intimidate the pedestrians and cars passing by. We were warned by participants to be discrete in taking pictures as we could be questioned and if we were found with a local resident, that person's name could be added onto GpMx's black-list.

Participants mentioned a black-list containing the names of workers actively involved in the 2007 protests and related activities carried out over time. These workers cannot work in BdC or in other mining sites owned by GpMx, including secondary or tertiary firms to whom BdC outsources services. On some occasions, extended family members have also been affected by the black-list. For example, we found that the niece of a former worker, who required practical training in mining engineering as part of her local college studies, was denied access to BdC and had to travel to Chihuahua State to undertake training.

Meanwhile, inside the mining site we were told during informal conversations and by Branch 65 interviewees (021 and 022, Cananea) who have colleagues working in the site that tactics of labor control are being carried out. Shifts are now of 12 hours (up from 8 hours back in 2007), workers are continuously monitored to discourage them from gathering in groups, and at the entrance they are asked to leave their personal belongings, including smart phones, to avoid rumors about labor rights violations being spread through social media.

The 2014 disaster has left resentment among the population affected as they interpret the corporation's absenteeism as abandonment over the three years in which the FRS was implementing the remedial program. The misinformation and mismanagement of the Trust was interpreted by some residents as a clear indication of how GpMx and government authorities 'can beat, step on and forget you'.

Resentment is accompanied by the uncertainty communities have in using tap water, because of the distrust they have about official verbal announcements that the water is not contaminated. As a result, residents along the Sonora River now buy 20-liter plastic containers of purified water; the new cost adds to the general memory of injustices that GpMx and government's structural policies inflicted upon Cananea's residents after the mine's privatization.

The coercive tactics of GpMx have been accompanied by federal state intervention in repressing the 2007 strike and road blockages in 2018 and more broadly through the surveillance of individuals, streets and highways. The latter is coupled with a wider national program of drug-trafficking control which is accentuated on the US-Mexico border. 'Mafia-like' disciplinary tactics are not absent either. On one occasion, we were told of rural residents being threatened by the local mafia after they complained to BdC about its breach of the water contract signed with the agrarian assembly (assembly member\_024, Cananea). Likewise, a couple of academics we approached were not keen to share information because of fear of intimidation by GpMx. These coercive tactics not only categorize resistance as conflict and manipulate participation, but also mismanage information to create fear, underlining the pathologies that lack of public and social accountability involve.

## Conclusions

The threefold strategy -policy distancing, legitimacy through control, and concealed coercion- carried out by GpMx shows how administrative domination is implemented at the everyday level. This administrative domination requires the aid of a wide range of state actors and a clear directorate in charge of implementing CSR policies, which in turn interweaves with government programs and projects, such as participatory budgeting. However, this threefold strategy functions through a series of contradictions in order to maintain hegemony: mismanaging information while creating spaces of citizen participation; distancing from political responsibility while opening spaces of rapprochement through Casa Grande's activities; promoting the city's beauty but neglecting its historical buildings; closing public spaces while opening quasi-private parks. It is important to note how all the latter contradictions have contributed to concealing repressive coercion, yet it appears that in the last instance coercive tactics, with aid of state actors, are used to maintain domination. Although it was not the focus of this paper, hegemony, in a Gramscian sense, is always contested, and in this sense the threefold strategy has responded to the pressures put by the mining union and grassroots resistance against the violation of labor and environmental rights.

By unpacking administrative domination, the paper has shown the usefulness of a Foucauldian approach in the everyday execution of power diffusion through a social body of relations, which has been built by GpMx, different state actors and local civil society/citizen groups. In centering the analysis on network governance, the concept of hegemony was applied at the local level, which helped unpack the coercive and



non-coercive execution of power This exercise would not have been possible without building links back to Gramscian foci on historicity, spatial scales and the coercion-consensus dialectics in which hegemony has been embedded in Mexican mining.

The paper also underlined that as the mining industry expands and intensifies, so does its influence in local policy-making, especially in countries with limited regulatory environments. Beyond the cases discussed here, there are several mining towns in Mexico which may encounter a similar trend in their local governance, to mention a few: Necozi and La Colorada in Sonora State, Sombrerete in Zacatecas State and Cerro San Pedro in San Luis Potosí State. Beyond Mexico, there are several emblematic cases in Latin America (see examples covered in the books edited by Rodríguez López, 2016). This paper has shown the relevance of emphasizing the limitations of network governance which merit further research, especially on the implications of distrust and limited accountability that stem from the local level and that can be found in CSR policies. However, if care is not taken, CSR can divert attention away from the shortfalls of administrative domination - mismanagement of information and unempowering participation- which sadly contribute to the development of a sclerotic state. Ironically, the CDD-Casa Grande's adoption of participatory mechanisms highlights the precarious role that municipal government has had and indirectly underlines the weak role of the municipality in Mexico's democratization. Three decades ago, municipal authorities were considered engines of democratic and participative innovation; but with the expansion of the extractive industry it seems that this role has been forgotten and instead has passed, by default, to the corporation. If academics and practitioners

continue overlooking this shift, the empowering principles inherent in the concept of local participatory democracy will soon be forgotten.

## Notes

1. The Sonora River Region is comprised of seven municipalities located to the south of Cananea: Arizpe, Banámichi, Huepac, San Felipe de Jesús, Aconchi, Baviácora and Ures.
2. Interviews were conducted with 9 government officers; 4 business sector individuals; 3 union members; 3 NGO officers, 3 local journalists and activists; 6 local residents; and 7 academics. Interviews were coded from 000 to 038. The strong conflict between different stakeholders required the author to maintain anonymity.
3. Data can be consulted in the Sonora River Trust monthly monitoring reports between 2014 and 2015 - [www.fideicomisoriosonora.gob.mx/monitoreo.html](http://www.fideicomisoriosonora.gob.mx/monitoreo.html) - Accessed 5 May 2019
4. This ruling was important as communities discovered in 2015 that BdC had plans to build a new 8km long tailings dam, equivalent in size to 4,158 football fields - [www.animalpolitico.com/2019/05/sonora-pres-a-consulta-grupo-mexico/](http://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/05/sonora-pres-a-consulta-grupo-mexico/) - Accessed 3 July 2019
5. In 2017, 18% of the Mining Fund was directed to Sonora State (ca MX\$690 million received out of a total of MX\$3,700 million). Cananea received MX\$283 million, equivalent to 40% - [www.gob.mx/sedatu/acciones-y-programas/fondo-minero-para-el-desarrollo-regional-sustentable](http://www.gob.mx/sedatu/acciones-y-programas/fondo-minero-para-el-desarrollo-regional-sustentable) - Accessed 22 October 2018

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